

HISTORICAL STUDY IN THE  
UNIVERSITY AND THE PLACE OF  
MEDIÆVAL HISTORY.

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AN INAUGURAL LECTURE.

George M. Wrong



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AN INAUGURAL LECTURE

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BY

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# HISTORICAL STUDY IN THE UNIVERSITY

AND

## THE PLACE OF MEDIÆVAL HISTORY



The custom of expecting an Inaugural Lecture from a new professor is venerable and reasonable. I am the more willing to honor it because I have desired to call attention to some things relating to the study of History in the University of Toronto, and to speak especially of the study of Mediæval History.

It is with a sense of responsibility that I remember the eminence of my predecessor in this chair. The collegiate world is peculiarly liable to forget its distinguished men. Graduates are soon absorbed in new interests, only the rare few keep up ties with *alma mater*, and the successive generations of students have no memory of former professors. But the peculiar distinction of Sir Daniel Wilson should long preserve his name from this oblivion. He served the University with the best energy of a strong man, and brought to his task an extraordinary variety of accomplishments. Early in life he was a friend of the painter Turner, and the fine engraving of Turner's picture, "Regulus leaving Carthage," is Sir Daniel Wilson's work. Art was to be for him, however, only an unfailing source of pleasure and recreation. He devoted himself to Archæology. While still a young man, he published his book on Prehistoric Scotland, and this at once placed him in the front rank in his own department of study. Then, recommended by the historian Hallam and others, he came to take the chair of History and English Literature at Toronto, and for nearly forty years he was one of the most active and conspicuous figures in our educational world. I once asked a colleague of Sir Daniel Wilson what was his most

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striking characteristic. The prompt answer was, "His rare unselfishness. He forgot himself, meals, rest, everything, in the eager interest of the duty of the hour." Into his varied activities he carried the lofty spirit and the simple faith of a Christian gentleman. He was the champion of the University in days when her friends needed to be strong, active, and fearless, and while as yet no official responsibility made this his peculiar duty. Not only at Toronto, but at Quebec, when the Legislature still sat there, he fought her battles. The first University building owed much to his knowledge of art and architecture. Some of its best stone carving was due to his suggestions, and after that disastrous night in February, 1890, he devoted himself to the huge task of restoration with an energy that really cost him his life.

The versatility even of Sir Daniel Wilson must have been strained by the work expected of him. When King's College was founded, it was proposed that Archdeacon Strachan, afterwards the first Bishop of Toronto, should combine with the office of President the professorship of Moral and Intellectual Philosophy, Christian Ethics, Political Economy, and Christian Theology. This should surely have saved the professor from the danger of getting into a rut. Our last President had nearly as huge a burden. History and English Literature each requires copious and varied reading, and to these, besides the duties of President, was attached Ethnology, which involved a vast amount of laborious detail, though occupying a minor place on the curriculum. Partial relief was given in 1883 by the appointment of the present lecturer in English, but not until the Federation Act of 1887 were the various subjects assigned to different chairs. This Act plans for a chair of History, a chair of English Literature, and a chair of Ethnology and Comparative Philology. Sir Daniel Wilson retained the chair of History. The Professor of English Literature is happily among us, but the Professor of Ethnology and Comparative Philology has not yet appeared, and Ethnology is still attached to the chair of History.

This division of labor has come none too soon. The study of History in this University has not developed with that of other subjects. Comparing our present staff with that of the not remote past when I was an undergraduate, I am struck by the

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general progress that has been made. Greek and Latin then had two instructors. They now have five. Mathematics and Physics then had two. They now have eight. Modern Languages then had one lecturer, and two occasional lecturers. They now have eight instructors, fully occupied. Economics and Jurisprudence were then not taught at all. They now have three professors. There has been some expansion in History, but undoubtedly less than in any other department, and this, too, in a period of revived historical interest. The Scotch universities in the past have always neglected historical studies, but the other day we saw Professors of History appointed at Edinburgh and Glasgow, and the more progressive of the American universities are paying especial attention to History. Besides minor teachers, Leland Stanford University has four Professors of History, the University of Chicago has three, and Cornell University three. Harvard University has six Professors of History, and, in all, twelve members of the History Faculty. The Faculty in Greek and Latin together numbers twelve, that in Mathematics and Physics together ten. We fall far short of this standard for History, but I trust that we may see some improvement in this respect ere long.

Upon this side of the Atlantic we have the advantage, in studying History, of being in some degree free from the inherited bitterness that clings to the scene of party conflicts in Europe. But we have also a heavy drawback. We have before us no historical monuments relating to the events we study. The anxiety of some American writers to carry our history farther back than to Jacques Cartier or the Puritan migration is pathetic. But a visit by Northmen to America in the eleventh century has not left us any monuments of the era of the Norman Conquest and of Hildebrand. The hoary age of our Laurentian hills mocks the late coming of European man. We have no Pantheon, no Westminster Abbey, no Notre Dame. An English boy who goes to Westminster has a condensed object-lesson in history that should teach him, in a few hours, more than our youth can learn in many days of laborious study. It is something to stand before the Confessor's shrine, and to see about it the royal tombs that speak of centuries of devotion. It is something to travel to Canterbury, and visit the last awful scene of that fierce conflict



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between Church and State under Henry II. The tomb of England's greatest hero of chivalry, the Black Prince, built before the wonder-working shrine of Becket, is a mute witness to the martyr's triumph even in death ; and that bare place, once the hallowed spot where all Europe heaped up offerings to Saint Thomas, has a tale to tell of the changed England of Henry VIII. and of Elizabeth. But we are without these aids, and for us History is less picturesque.

Dealing with the men and the forces that have influenced society, History is of perhaps more general interest than any other academic subject ; but this is, in reality, a drawback to its serious study. Few people are so ignorant that they do not know something about History. To read it requires no preliminary discipline. The simplest text-book in Chemistry or Biology has a technical language intelligible only to a special student, but any untrained reader can enjoy his Macaulay or his Froude, lounging on a sofa, or toasting his knees before the fire. The result is that men who have not given an hour's serious study to historical questions will assume the tone of experts and critics with a light-heartedness that is amazing. History is concerned with wide and complex movements. These have the superficial interest of all narrative, but they have a deeper meaning, only to be grasped when the insight and discrimination of a trained student are brought to the task. Even copious readers of History may be without these qualifications, for mere multifarious reading does not educate the mind. The copious reader may let ideas run through his brain as a brook babbles over stones, leaving nothing behind. He may have no conception of the mental processes employed in constructing the narrative that flows so smoothly. Some men will assume that to write History is the facile task of saying over again what other people have already said. Others will go to the opposite extreme, and imagine that it involves hidden methods which a layman may not enquire into. Ignorant minds clothe even learning with superstition. They dimly picture the historian working in a great library, surrounded by dusty folios and almost indecipherable manuscripts, and in some occult way extracting the information of the printed page. No historical work of our own time shows greater erudition than



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Freeman's *Norman Conquest*, and Freeman is pictured ransacking the treasures of the Bodleian Library, poring over folios standing untouched in dark corners for ages, and destroying his eyesight over manuscripts.

Now, it should be urged that the sound student of History does not repeat simply what other men have said. He never ceases to doubt their wisdom or accuracy, and he throws upon the past a fresh light by giving it the new interpretation of a discerning mind. On the other hand, there is no secret art in writing History. The *Norman Conquest* was not written in a great library. It was written in Freeman's own house. He drew his principal information, not from scattered sources inaccessible to ordinary people, but from printed books for the most part within reach of any man. He did not puzzle over manuscripts. I have little doubt that the increasing rigor of historical study will make it necessary for any great historian in the future to use manuscript as well as printed material. But friends of Freeman have told me that he never read an ancient manuscript in his life. There was nothing occult or mysterious in his writing of History. He studied the printed literature of the Norman Conquest, and with laborious effort and masterly insight retold the story as well as he could. No doubt he went to other libraries for information, and he studied pictures, localities, manners—everything that might give him a vivid understanding of the story he told. But his principal work was upon a few books. These are in our own library. We can go to them as Freeman did, and study their meaning for ourselves.

Perhaps History alone has had this peculiar fortune to be considered either too easy or too difficult to be taught. When the first Napoleon was reorganizing education in France, he struck History from the programme of instruction. "History," said his adviser, Roederer, "will cease to be a separate branch of education, history, properly so called, needing only to be read in order to be learned." In Napoleon's case there is the suspicion that he was afraid to let the youth of France study the past, but with many the objection is sincere that History does not need an oral teacher. Yet, if we consider the present position of historical study in this country, we shall find a more than ample field for

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the work of the historical professor. I am informed on high authority that no other subject is so ill-taught in our schools, and I do not need to be informed that students come up to this University with little interest in the past, or curiosity about the larger questions of the outside world. They have three or four years of study here, and then the relentless business of making a living awaits them. Their future thinking will be determined largely by the impetus they receive while they are here. Dr. Johnson declared that his intellectual tastes were formed before he was eighteen. Those of the ordinary man are certainly formed by the time he takes his degree. He has not read very widely or thought very deeply, but he ought to have laid a foundation for both, and the stability of the foundation will depend mainly upon his teachers.

The duty of the professor is to awaken or to instruct this intellectual interest. There ought to be a wide gulf between the spoken and the written word. The lecture has been assaulted by "advanced" educationists, and the historical lecture has received the heaviest attack of all, but the wise teacher will value it as the best means of instruction within his reach. There are, of course, lectures and lectures. The English phrase for the duty of the historical professor is that he should *read* a certain number of lectures in each term, and the Germans have only the word *lesen* to describe a professor's work. The word is literally interpreted too often. Mr. Froude recently read at Oxford twenty lectures on Erasmus which were only the twenty chapters of his forthcoming book, and I have myself heard a professor in the University of Berlin read to his class as a lecture the printed chapter of his book already published. It is not hard to understand the prejudice that has arisen against historical lectures in this sense. Students could read the book in half the time that it takes the professor, who is usually not a trained elocutionist, to drone it out. Two pregnant lectures on Erasmus would do the hearers more good than Mr. Froude's twenty, for the two could point out the salient features of the work of Erasmus, and then the students could go to the professor's book with an awakened interest in the details to be found there. The expanse of History is huge and perplexing. It appears at first to be a valley

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of dry bones—very many, and very dry—and the serious student will be grateful for any guidance that will help him to breathe life and meaning into them.

We have happily had in this University a professor who has furnished to those who come after him a model to which they may look humbly for guidance. Professor Young had varied accomplishments, but he was, above all, an inspiring teacher. It is fifteen years since I first sat in his classroom. My recollection of what I gleaned from the laborious study of books in those days is worse than misty, but I can recall with vivid reality the eager face and voice of the living teacher. Phrases that he used will never die out of my memory. The truth that he taught his students became an inalienable endowment of their mental life. He threw out leading ideas, and repeated them over and over again. He wrote them upon the blackboard, and entreated us to stop and think what it all meant. We could not escape his urgency, and went to our books prepared to find something there. Undoubtedly, wide reading and patient thinking would have enabled us in time to discover for ourselves all that he told us. But few of us could spend a lifetime in study, and his teaching helped us to do in a few years what we should never have done alone.

If the professor has thus a useful sphere in pointing out the real meaning of historical movements, he has also a further necessary work. Students of History ought to become something more than passive receivers of other men's opinions, and to earn the right to do their own thinking upon historical questions. The first axiom of sound historical study is that it involves some, if necessarily a very limited, dealing with original authorities. Inevitably, we learn the greater part of our history at second hand, for it is the labor of a lifetime to exhaust the original material for even a short span. Yet a peep into the workshop of History, by going to the authorities for a chosen period, is necessary if we are to understand a sound historical method, and to set our own minds working freely and intelligently upon these questions. We shall always miss in the modern narrative of past events many of the gleams of human nature that only a contemporary can give. Mr. Hodgkin may describe Roman society

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at the beginning of the fifth century, but it is only when we see it with the keen eye of Jerome that we get the most striking glimpses of the play of character. It is he who peoples Rome and the provinces with living men and women. We see the housewife busy and troubled over her husband's dinner party; the devout lady speaking in a low voice, as if worn out by fasting, anxious to appear wholly spiritual in a sinful world, but keeping an eye open to see if the men are looking at and admiring her sanctity. We see the delicate and studious girl poring over her Greek and Hebrew, and the gay and thoughtless girls with their complexions improved by art, their hair dyed red, and their tight sleeves and elegantly fitting dresses. We hear the noisy students shouting in the clamor of debate, and watch the scented fop plastering his hair over his brown skull to the best advantage. It is all in Jerome; very little of it has filtered through the historians who tell us of Jerome's times. The biting tongue of the recluse at Bethlehem has, we may be sure, more to tell of the men and women of his day than modern scholars can repeat for him.

Historians have spent huge labor upon the *Voelkerwanderung*, the barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire, and the subsequent relations of the conqueror to the conquered. But when we read one trifling poem of Sidonius Apollinaris, much is made clear to us. A friend has asked Sidonius, in Gaul, to compose a wedding ode. In a short poem-letter he complains that he cannot get the leisure to do it. He is surrounded by huge Burgundians, who, though strong enough to be masters, are yet quite friendly, and indeed too friendly. They come in the morning to salute him before daybreak, and, like great boys, treat him as if he were their grandfather. His refined Roman ears are offended by their guttural German, and they will sing their barbarous songs, which he must applaud and try to enjoy. They smell of the rancid butter which they smear upon their hair, and of garlic and onions. He has to feed huge numbers of them at his table. How can a man write poetry with these gigantic Germans about one? he asks pathetically, and we see, as we could scarcely see in a more studied narrative, the disgust and helplessness of the Roman, and the rude boy-like strength of the Teuton, who, with all his power, is yet humbled in the presence of the higher culture.



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We need not, indeed, believe all that even contemporary writers say. Mistake and lying are not new things. The inhabitants of St. Kilda, in the Hebrides, were seized with colds whenever a ship arrived, and they believed that in some inexplicable way contact with the strangers produced this malady. It was left to others to point out that a ship could land its company at St. Kilda only when there was a northeast wind. This wind, and not the travellers, caused the colds. When we apply our own minds to the statements of contemporary writers, we shall often detect blunders as absurd. The Spanish discoverers of Mexico declared that its civilization surpassed that of contemporary Europe. They saw stately buildings, gorgeous religious processions, a lavish use of the precious metals, and they took these to be marks of high culture. But they were mistaken. The best implements that the Aztecs had were of bronze or stone. They had not learned the use of iron. The great buildings were huge masses of masonry piled up clumsily, and without any knowledge of the principle of the arch. They have since crumbled away. The religious processions were the rites of atrocious cannibals, whose culture was, in fact, only a stage in advance of that of the Iroquois Indians. Yet, if we believed eye-witnesses, we should have thought the Aztecs civilized. After Mr. Froude's "History of England" had run the gauntlet of the critics, he declared that in the whole twelve volumes they had detected only four or five mistakes in his use of his authorities. If this is true, the condemnation of Mr. Froude's insight is only the greater. He found Henry VIII. described by contemporaries as a far-seeing and benevolent statesman. It might have gone hard with any one in England who dared express any other belief under the Tudors, and Mr. Froude read his books instead of reading also the true meaning of the facts.

When we go to these original authorities, it is obvious that we are making high claims upon the intelligence of the student. The rarest combination of gifts is required to weigh justly the records of a remote age. In the light of what the slow progress of time has approved of as wisdom, or condemned as folly, it is easy enough to form sharp and rigorous judgments upon the men and the institutions of the past. But it is not so easy to stand side by side with Gregory of Tours, to see things as he saw them, and

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to give generous sympathy to a noble man, without forgetting that neither good intentions nor ardent devotion take the place of wisdom. Intellectual acuteness, chastened imagination, sympathetic feeling, are all necessary. But in appealing to them we have awakened the whole mental life, and in thus learning to understand the men of the past we have enlarged our knowledge of human nature. One ought not to forget the immaturity of undergraduates, or to imagine that we can give every student the training of a professed historian. Almost no study is exhaustive, and historical study least of all. When we seek to mirror a past age, one line of enquiry suggests half a dozen others. We see dim vistas stretching away before us, and we begin to suspect that life is all too short to do anything completely. So perhaps it is, and we shall not expect completed work from undergraduates. But we may expect them to learn to question ready-made conclusions, to investigate, to weigh evidence, and to express the results in literary form. And to do this students must make up their minds to consult books in other tongues than English. Mr. Freeman, addressing Oxford undergraduates, outlined an equipment in languages that would be useful: "He who to his Greek, Latin, and Teutonic can add Celtic, Slavonic, Lithuanian, the rival speech of the Arab, even the more uncouth tongues of the Turk and the Magyár, will certainly not regret having added so many unusual weapons to his historic armory." Mr. Freeman's undergraduate, like Macaulay's schoolboy, is a very wonderful person. We have few such prodigies here, but it is surely not aiming too high to expect honor students in History to read both Latin and French. The Norman Conquest cannot be studied without a knowledge of Latin, nor the French Revolution without a knowledge of French.

A Professor of History has the whole past to choose from, but, by custom, the work of this chair is limited to mediæval and modern history. I am well content that it should be so. In the huge span from 325 to 1871, one could select a dozen fascinating epochs of exhaustless interest. We ought to pay especial attention to the Middle Ages, for no other period is so pregnant of results for our own time, and so little understood. Perhaps the world of letters is weary of the reiterated emphasis

upon the unity of history. It is true that this has been a late discovery, and even so recently as Arnold's day it was necessary to remind us of "the really modern history of Grece and Rome." By this time, however, surely we have learned that later generations spring from earlier ones, that the *himation* and the toga clothed men of like passions with ourselves, and that there is nothing new under the sun. In fact, though modern western life has been profoundly influenced by ancient Greece and Rome, they are yet severed from us by a great gulf. With these two pioneers of western culture we have no moral unity. Greece surpassed us in taste, as Rome did in organization, but we are the ethical superiors of both nations. The vigorous discipline of Roman family life had, indeed, some features that our own relaxed society might imitate with profit, and domestic affection was not wanting. One may still read the inscriptions which the Roman provincial in distant Britain wrote in memory of his dead: "To my most sweet child"; "To a dearly loved daughter"; "To a sainted wife who lived thirty-three years without a single fault"; "To my wife, with whom I lived without one disagreement." But the spirit of Greek and Roman life was widely different from ours. We have all heard recently the desolate grief of Creon in the Greek tragedy. Robbed of his wife and of his son, he cries: "I know not which way I should bend my gaze, or where I should seek support." We miss the sweetness of Christian consolation, as we miss in the Roman the deeper tenderness of Christian love. The Roman father sometimes condemned his own infant children to be exposed to perish from cold and hunger, or to be drowned, or, it is even said, to be thrown to the dogs. Seneca called Pity the vice of a little mind giving way at the sight of other men's misfortunes. Useful manual labor was to both Greek and Roman the degrading occupation of slaves.

Christianity came with far other conceptions. The catacombs have preserved the vivid contrast with Roman ideas which Christian teaching furnished. We find there a spirit moving as if in the bosom of the earth, soon to burst forth and dominate western life. Its thoughts are of peace and hope. In contrast with Roman sternness, it urged universal pity and sympathy. The



most frequent figure of the catacombs is the tender shepherd carrying upon his shoulders the sheep that was lost. The inscriptions show scarcely any trace of the harsh relations involved in the terms master and slave. Differences of rank are forgotten in the fellowship of faith, and Christianity enforced its maxim, that if a man will not work neither shall he eat, by the example of its chief teachers. They honored and dignified manual labor.

It is in the mediæval period that we find these new conceptions slowly taking form, and the gulf between the old and the new order steadily widens. Christian society has not been exempt from the universal law that we learn wisdom by mistake and failure. New truth made possible new error in its perversion. In conflict with pagan vice, the Christian teachers set up narrow, and sometimes degrading, ideals of holiness. To many of them life upon earth became a bad dream, which a good man would not wish to prolong. When Bernard of Clairvaux lay dying, surrounded by weeping friends who prayed that God would let him stay a little longer, he entreats, "Why do you thus detain a miserable man? Spare me, spare me, and let me depart." Many wholesome human interests were neglected, but the era was not so full of ignorance, disorder, and violence as the popular fancy pictures it. The unifying organization of the Roman Empire was broken up, and was ultimately succeeded by a large number of small states practically independent of each other. In the earlier times travellers passed freely by the Roman roads from the most distant places in the empire to the capital, but now this intercourse was checked. Law and order did not disappear, but Roman unity was gone. Each great feudal lord had the right to wage war upon his own account. History is silent about the peaceful incidents of daily life; and as we read of the petty struggles of the Middle Ages, the times may well seem to be full only of war and violence. But, in reality, a strong commercial and social life was developed. The Empire of Venice, "the only empire," as Dean Church has said, "that has yet matched Rome in length and steadiness of tenure," belongs to the Middle Ages, and it was to commerce that Venice, the mediæval Great Britain, owed her supremacy. Commerce is the friend of peace, and surely brought

a more healthful triumph than that of the Roman armies. The intense life of the smaller Italian commonwealths had elements of strength that were wanting under Roman rule. Imperialism gave military order, but it showed a stronger rapacity than was possible in the disunion of later times. We sometimes forget that the culture of Greece and Rome was for the few, and that the toiling masses who ministered to it were sunk in a slavery whose hopeless feature was that no stirrings of conscience among the ruling classes urged an improvement of the slaves' condition. As far as we can now learn, Roman Britain meant a subject people harried by Roman taskmasters. Roman Gaul saw the Imperial system more fully perfected, and many of the provincials were at length glad to welcome the barbarian conqueror as a relief from Roman tyranny and extortion. The new masters who overthrew Rome were violent and brutal enough, but England and France in the Middle Ages were certainly not less happy than Britain and Gaul had been. The powerful voice of the Church was often, if, unhappily, not always, on the side of the humbler classes. Feudalism developed under Christian influences, and brought rights as well as obligations to the tillers of the soil. Their duties to their masters were strictly defined, and when they had paid their debt of labor and produce what remained over belonged to themselves. Both master and servant were gainers. History shows conclusively that slavery is not only a moral wrong, but an economic error. The competition of free labor gives the employer a better and cheaper service than he can exact from the slave, and it helps the servant to acquire self-reliant manhood. In the Middle Ages the chief nations of Europe were taught this lesson, and the end of the fourteenth century saw the peasants of England emancipated. But not only did material improvement come to the poor during this period. Classic culture had had no gospel for them, but the Church stooped even to the lowest, and tried to inspire their lives with her high ideals. Her reward is seen in the affection of the people for the saints of the mediæval world. St. Bernard roused all Europe by his call to arms. Socrates and Cicero are holy names of the Greek and Roman calendar, but their deaths at the command of the civil power were unavenged. St. Thomas à Becket shook an empire by his fall.

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The Middle Ages were thus fruitful in effecting a gigantic social change. The age which saw the founding of the great European universities, which gave Oxford and Cambridge more liberal benefactors than they have found in modern times, did not neglect the cultivation of the mind, yet the weakest side of mediæval life is found in what relates to the intercourse of the upper classes. The rivalries of the petty states made wars frequent and social intercourse difficult. Literature and art suffered in consequence. Probably few great works of genius have ever been produced without the stimulus of a large circle of minds to which the author might look for applause and sympathy. If there were no minds to whom the poet felt that he could speak, he might well choose to die with his great thoughts unexpressed. At Athens every citizen appreciated and criticized the drama. Rome saw her best literary development when Augustus had brought together all the choice spirits of the time. Dante ripened into a poet amid the keen rivalries of Florence. But the mediæval monk, secluded in his convent, had not the same opportunity to be polished into a classic, and was preoccupied with questions of even more moment than those of literature and art. He probed the mysteries of conscience, and a stern sense of duty led him to submit his thought and his will to the direction of the Church whose servant he was. But mediæval life has its freer side. The Renaissance, in which men replaced divine contemplation by more human interests, and rejoiced again in "earthly passion, the liberty of the heart," is a less definite historical period than is generally imagined. Historians used to trace its beginnings to the fifteenth century, when Greek thought revived in the west, but now they are finding a Renaissance within the Middle Ages. Mr. Pater retells the charming Provençal stories of Ami and Amile, and of Aucassin and Nicolette, to show that in the thirteenth century, when they were written, delicate human feeling and appreciation of nature were already to be found. We shall find them still earlier. St. Francis of Assisi had beneath his beggar's robe a poet's heart that claimed fellowship with the winds and the birds, whom he called his brothers and sisters. Nearly a century earlier Heloise wrote to Abelard those love letters which show that human passion still claimed its sway :

" All is not Heaven's while Abelard has part,  
Still rebel Nature holds out half my heart."

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The thousands who flocked to the lectures of Abelard, original and defiant in tone as they were, reveal a keen intellectual interest at the very height of the dark ages. Earlier still, Guibert de Nogent describes his widowed mother, and we see that violence and disorder tell only half the story of the era of the Norman Conquest. There is a gentler side. The name of her dead husband, says Guibert, was continually upon her lips. In her relief of the poor and other daily duties her thoughts were still ever of him, and she constantly whispered his name. The boy, when flogged at school by his brutal master, was always sure of her tender sympathy. Bernard of Clairvaux loved the peaceful beauty of nature, and long before him Alcuin, the friend of Charles the Great, breathes happy thoughts of the trees near his convent cell, with their interlacing branches and flowery verdure, of the garden where the lily mingles with the rose, and of the birds which sing matins to celebrate their Creator. Human nature was in the Middle Ages the same as we now find it, and in all periods there have been spirits craving for more light. The course of history is a growth on the same slow method that nature uses in all her greater processes. No important social change is effected suddenly. The Renaissance is real enough. It marks the emancipation of the mind from the exclusive sway of moral ideas narrower than the just aspirations of the human spirit. But it does not prove all that had gone before it to have been a mistake. On the contrary, it is the witness to that law of growth in Christian society which ripened the Middle Ages into something better.

If I could do nothing else, I have desired to-day to show how important the mediæval period really is. It is in the Middle Ages that the foundations of our own well-being are deeply rooted. No other country shows the unbroken development of a thousand years that England has had. The present of no other nation is so inseparably tied up with its past, for the machinery of English government, its merits and its defects, are in large part an inheritance from the Middle Ages. The result is that reverence for ancient custom has peculiar strength with Englishmen. In connection with the problems of to-day, it is a factor that needs to be studied and understood.

It is a keen interest in man and in human affairs that qualifies us for the study of History. There is nowadays among



men of culture a fashion of professing to scorn to be interested in the current political life of the nation. It is a bad fashion. A man may too soon and irrevocably decide upon his political principles; he cannot too soon awake to an interest in the forces that are working in the society about him. We cannot doubt that the wise student of the past is the best interpreter of the present. The value of History is, indeed, not to be measured in this direct way. Curiosity is an endowment of our intellectual life, and our zeal to know is not limited by the usefulness of knowing. We should wish to read about Napoleon and Cæsar and Alexander, even if our knowledge should have no value in practical life. All intellectual exercises are indirectly useful. They develop mental vigor, and when they are concerned with the actions of the great men and the great forces in history the benefit of enlarged vision and keener discernment will be a sufficient reward for all our labor. But I will not conceal my belief that pre-eminently by this study are men made wiser and more useful. The claims upon the intelligence of every good citizen are daily becoming sterner. The free citizen of ancient Athens, and of mediæval Florence, lived in a state so small that he might well be expected to understand almost intuitively his political duty. He voted for men whom he knew, and for measures working in such a limited field that he could, in some fair degree, estimate their influence. Yet these smaller states made shipwreck. The citizen of a modern state, such as ours, is acting in a larger sphere, and facing more complex issues. Our own easy certainty that we shall not fail is no reassuring factor in our condition. We are not in the best possible world, and where there is ignorance and vice there is always danger. English political institutions show the firm balance derived from a deep historical setting. We have taken them from their home, and placed them amid conditions entirely different. Our society has had little of the stern discipline in political thinking of the firmly knit English society, and our want of this training makes us prone to follow abstract theories. But if modern experience teaches anything, it should be the futility of *doctrinaire* politics. The liberty that the patriot Greek of seventy-five years ago believed would restore the departed glory of Hellas was at length won. Liberty was the

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coveted opportunity, but it needed an enlightened people to use it well, and the little kingdom of to-day has not shown conspicuously that she possesses this wisdom. France tore herself free a hundred years ago, only, ten years later, to cast three and a half million votes for despotism. After another fifty years, when experience should have taught something, she repeated the act.

The disquieting feature of a good deal of the propagandism among us is this devotion to vague ideals, rather than to prolonged observation and patient study. The world is old, not young, and human nature has through the centuries remained unchanged. Social conditions have been improved, manners have softened, we are more enlightened, but we have still the same old strength and weakness. One sometimes sees a fancied new theory pressed with great zeal and earnestness, when a little historical study would show this particular bubble to have been pricked perhaps a thousand years ago. I should not go with Mr. Froude so far as to say that, of every hundred new ideas, ninety-nine are generally nonsense; but I should urge the wisdom of enquiring if the new idea is not, after all, an old and bad one. Platform rhetoric will inflame men's passions and win their votes, but it will not make good laws. It was St. Ambrose who said, "It hath not pleased the Lord to deliver his people in dialectic." Conditions, not theories, mould human society, and to master the conditions we must study them. If we would learn the secrets of our well-being, we must give the service of trained faculties and of laborious days. It is humbling to know that any of us can do but little, yet it is all-important that we should do it well. The humility of truth-seekers ought to make us willing to learn from others, and when we are in this spirit History will help us. In the calm study of the problems of the past we shall acquire the temper and the wisdom to solve our own.







